

Notes on Sources

Leo Marker

EMILY MARKER

Leo's identity as a composer meant everything to him. Born in 1911 to well-off Jewish parents in Habsburg Galicia, he grew up in interwar Vienna, where he studied composition under Alban Berg. In his twenties in mid-1930s Vienna, Leo wrote operettas and had several big hits. When he fled to France after Kristallnacht in late 1938, he carried little else with him other than a suitcase stuffed with his scores. Those musical manuscripts survived his internment first in Clermont-Ferrand as an "enemy alien" and then in Vichy concentration camps in southern France (Gurs and then Les Milles) and his emigration (via Casablanca) to the United States. His budding career, however, did not. In New York, Leo continued to write music but with limited success, ultimately putting together a small income from a patchwork of jobs – teaching music theory to private students and music appreciation courses in Hunter College's adult education program. For the rest of his life, he was haunted by his early promise and success. His truncated career was ever-present and the object of a decades-long but ultimately fruitless quest for meaningful reparations. Leo died in obscurity, best remembered (if at all) for songs he had written in the camps rather than his triumphs on the Viennese stage before the war.¹

Leo was my grandfather. His story is part of a personal family history I am developing into a book, tentatively titled, *Leo & Gerti: Broken Lives and the Search for Repair in the 20th and 21st Centuries*.² My grandmother Gerti, also from Vienna, was fifteen at the time of the Anschluss and got to London in late 1938 via the Kindertransport. For more than forty years Austria was not held accountable for the fate of Austrian Jews during the Holocaust. That changed in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War and Austria's adhesion to the European Union. Reparations to Austrian Holocaust victims then became a tacit condition of Austria's "Europeanization." Leo died before the new reparations policy took effect, but Gerti was able to participate in a program that allowed survivors to buy into Austria's generous social security system. Used to living modestly out of necessity, she spent little of the pension money she received from the late 1990s

¹ Leo and his work get at most a rare mention in the history of the music scene in 1930s Vienna. One such mention is in Theodor Adorno's book on Alban Berg, in a footnote, whereas a lyric from a song Leo wrote in a concentration camp furnished the title of the first German-language study on Gurs: Gabriele Mittag, *'Es gibt Verdammte nur in Gurs': Literatur, Kultur, und Alltag in einem französischen Internierungslager, 1940-1942* (Tübingen: Attempto, 1996).

² I take the term "personal family history" from Stéphane Gerson, "A History from Within: When Historians Write about Their Own Kin," *Journal of Modern History* 94, no. 4 (December 2022): 898-937.

until her death in 2018. I, in turn, inherited the rest. The book's key interventions will explore how the continent's transnational reparations regime helps define the contours of contemporary European identity, the implications of reparations with regards to the intergenerational transfer of wealth, and how both of those considerations might reframe heated debates about reparations for slavery and colonial atrocities in postcolonial Europe today.

One of the central challenges of launching a project like this is constructing enough of a narrative of Leo and Gerti's wartime and postwar experiences from their personal archives and the random bits of family lore my dad and I have gleaned over the years to know where to go and what to look for in repositories in Europe. As is the case with many families of survivors, Leo and Gerti shared some memories, but we hesitated to ask follow-up questions, in part out of fear of upsetting them and in part because such questions seemed unwelcome. So we must make sense out of the unruly hodgepodge of oral and written fragments that we have. This is challenging, frustrating work, but when the stories and the papers sync up to reveal a whole so much greater than its parts, it is truly thrilling. I certainly felt exhilarated as I came to appreciate all the facets of the document reprinted and translated here, even though the source and the life experiences it illuminates are terribly sad and painful to think about. As my dad and I started to work through Leo's papers, my dad recalled an anecdote about Leo's life as an impoverished refugee in France before the defeat. In summer 1939 there was a rumor making the rounds in Paris that Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Reich Minister for Propaganda, was interested in staging one of Leo's musicals or adapting it into a film as a vehicle for Goebbels's mistress. That same summer, Leo found his way to a soup kitchen in Paris that had been set up for refugees. Among the hungry throngs of people there, someone in line recognized him and shouted, "Look there! It's Leonard Marker! The Nazis are going to turn his show into a movie and here he is trying to get free food!" My dad teared up as he told me that Leo said he was so mortified that he slunk away without getting his meal. My dad could not remember when or in what context Leo relayed the anecdote to him; there surely is real emotional truth in it – and clearly, this had been a traumatic experience and painful memory for Leo—but my dad and I put little stock in the rumor itself.

According to this document (fig. 1), the story behind the rumor is even more bizarre than what my dad remembered. It is a photocopy Leo obtained (when, and from where, I do not know) of an article from a German-language Paris daily. Dated 6 July 1939, this piece surely was the source of the rumor. The article is a blistering attack on Nazi hypocrisy in the proscription of so-called degenerate art. The title is a play on words of the title of Leo's most successful show, "Warum lügst Du, Chérie?" [Why Are You Lying, Darling?]. The author, Stefan Fingal, another Viennese who worked as a culture writer in Paris before the war, claims that at the time of writing, the show was being staged in Berlin. He reports that Goebbels obtained the rights of this and another of Leo's hits from the Aryanized publishing house in Vienna that had previously held them, so that Goebbels's cousin - an aspiring theater director - could score an easy hit. Fingal surmised that Goebbels chose Leo's show precisely because it was a proven success, and that even Goebbels's "theater nobody cousin" would be hard pressed to mess it up.



Fig. 1: Annotated photocopy of the original 1939 *Pariser Tageszeitung* article (see Appendix for English translation), part of a dossier of correspondence with a reparations lawyer from the late 1960s in my grandparents' files.

I will have to dig into German and Austrian archives to find out more about this production of a “Jewish” operetta in Berlin in 1939, but what is especially interesting to me is that I found this document in a folder of correspondence with a reparations lawyer who Leo & Gerti worked with in the 1960s and 70s in their futile attempt to obtain meaningful compensation for the destruction of Leo’s career. This document establishes Leo’s renown and talent, and the expropriation of his work and his impoverishment, all at once. The soup kitchen episode was clearly traumatizing for him, and yet, in his search for repair, Leo had to document it, and continue to *dwell there*, in that particularly painful memory for more than thirty years. Reparations claims entail documentation, and so claimants become researchers and archivists – autobiographers really – of their own life horrors. That may seem obvious, but I only really *felt* the weight of it reading and rereading this document in light of the soup kitchen anecdote and the emotional exchange with my dad. He and I have barely scratched the surface of Leo and Gerti’s papers. It is going to be a long, emotional ride.

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Appendix: English source translation³

“Goebbels, why are you lying, darling?”

Pariser Tageszeitung
6 July 1939, no. 1041

According to frightful reports coming out of Germany, plays by non-Aryan authors are not allowed to be performed in the Third Reich. Per those frightful reports, the Reich Chamber of Culture requires its members to prove that they have four Aryan grandparents, a requirement that extends to the last choristers and extras. This [rule] applies to painters, sculptors, writers, journalists, singers, and actors. Offenbach, Edmund Eisler and Oskar Strauss are also banned from stage, film and radio, and Meyerbeer, Halevy, Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal are not to be mentioned at all. Indeed, these frightful reports were printed in the [*Deutscher*] *Reichs Anzeiger* and yet this story is nevertheless a despicable invention of uprooted parasitic elements in foreign countries. In Vienna, as it turns out, a piece by three non-Aryan authors was staged five months after the annexation, and now a work by the same authors has been playing in a Berlin operetta theater for two weeks; doubtless . . . one need but listen!

The young composer of operettas Leonhard K. Märker had a resounding success with his operetta, “Why Are You Lying, Darling?” and he was counted among the great hopes of Viennese operetta of the post-war period, certain—as critics have written and everyone today agrees—to continue the tradition of Johann Strauss and Franz Lehár. At its premiere in the “Scala,” Vienna’s most modern and elegant theater (the former Johann Strauss Theater), the operetta had a triumph of the kind that has in recent years rarely been granted to a work of the cheerful muse [i.e., a work of light entertainment]. Friedl Czepa, who came from spoken theater, made her debut as an opera singer. The piece and the star caused a sensation. “Why Are You Lying, Darling?” ran for two seasons on five Viennese stages: the Scala, the Stadttheater, the Volksoper, the Raimund Theater, and the Variété des Westens. The work continued its triumphal run abroad in Italy, Holland, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Only in the German Reich, prior to the Anschluss, was it not allowed to be played. Today it can.

From the back-story of this interesting deviation from the principles of the Nuremberg Laws one learns interesting details. Freidl Czepa went to Goebbels even before the cultural debacle in Austria and asked him to pardon the ancestors of the authors of the operetta, all three of whom—Märker and the librettists Hans Lengsfelder and Sigfried Tisch—are Jews or are

³ English translation of the original German text prepared by the JWSFH team with assistance from Joshua Timm. A digitized version of the original German publication can be found online: <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/newspaper/item/T7EGDYAWRMVPG4YHVILLYK6KAIK6THO?issuepage=4>.

considered Jews [according to the Nuremberg Laws]. Goebbels was looking for a *modus vivendi*. It was decided to simply declare Märker an Aryan, which, according to the Nuremberg Laws, he is not. The lyricists Lengsfelder and Tisch were to be buried in the mass grave of dead silence, in which the poet of "Loreley" already rests alongside Brammer, Grünwald and Bodansky, the librettist of Franz Léhar. Goebbels had a certain private interest in the realization of the project. He wanted to launch [the career of] some brother-in-law or cousin, a no-name in the theatre scene [literally: "a theater nobody"]. This was to be widely publicized, but since the Reich propaganda minister did not have much confidence in [the cousin's] abilities as a director, he was given the operetta "Why Are You Lying, Darling?", which was already a minor world success and thus nothing much could go wrong, served up ready for use and ready for the stage. His head would then be adorned with foreign laurels. The negotiations dragged on; the upheaval came. Vienna was conquered and the Max Pfeffer publishing house, which owned the rights, was taken over. Max Pfeffer himself went abroad. Nobody knows where he is, or where Krämer and Tisch are. Lengsfelder is said to be in America. A Mr. Böhme from the old Reich took over the publishing house and the rights. He not only acquired the rights to "Why Are You Lying, Darling?" but also to the second operetta by the same authors, "The Ministry Is Insulted." This piece was played at the Scala for five whole months under Hitler and Goebbels. The names of the authors were simply left off the playbill. You couldn't replace them with others, as was done later in Berlin, because the public had read these names too often beforehand. Needless to say, the authors didn't get a penny in royalties and Böhme pocketed all the money. The composer was not allowed to enter the theater.

Since June 20, "Why Are You Lying, Darling?" has been running in a theater on the Unter den Linden in the heart of Berlin. It's now called "Don't Lie, Baby!" The revised text is slightly overmannered and completely unknown names appear on the playbill. The music is of course the same and today Berlin sings along to its melody: "Don't lie, baby, don't lie!" as Vienna, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Budapest, Warsaw, Zagreb, and Prague had sung "Why Are You Lying, Darling?"

So why are you lying, oh *Reichs Anzeiger*, and proclaiming that non-Aryan authors are not allowed to play? Why are you lying, oh, conformist non-culture officials of the Third Reich, that non-Aryan artists poison the soul of the German people, [that they] have destructive and demoralizing effects? Or are we to believe Leonhard Märker's music is so much more beautiful than Offenbach's that it justifies a deviation from the racial laws?

Goebbels, why are you Lying, darling?

Stefan Fingal